

R Baker
The advantage and honour of a religious
descent.
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A
S E R M O N
Preached to
Y O U N G P E O P L E
A T
H A N D - A L L E T,

December the 25th 1727.

By J O H N E V A N S.

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L O N D O N :

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2 TIMOTHY i. 5.

When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice, and I am persuaded that in thee also.

PAUL, now *the aged*, begins this epistle with expressions of the greatest tenderness and affection to Timothy his dearly beloved son in Christ. An old and experienced soldier of Jesus Christ, who was almost at the end of his labour and service, *ready to be offered, and the time of whose departure was at hand*; as he declares, chap. iv. 6. addresses himself to one who was likely to fight the Lord's battels, when he should be dead and gone. The past character of such a rising hope, and the agreeable prospect of his future usefulness, filled the heart of an affectionate servant of Christ with joy and praise. Though St. Paul was now himself in a suffering state; yet he was not so entirely taken up in prayer upon his own account, as to forget to offer the best wishes at the throne of grace for one who in the course of nature had a much longer time of service before him. *I thank God, whom I serve*
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from my forefathers with a pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day, ver. 3. This was the best expression he could give of his sincere love to *Timothy*, to remember him without ceasing in the sight of God, 1 *Thess.* i. 3. But the apostle farther signifies his affection by being desirous to see him, that he might be filled with joy, ver. 4. It would be one of the greatest pleasures he could receive in his present confinement to have an opportunity to converse with so good a man, though *Timothy* was so much behind him in years, and below his apostolical character.

The apostle gives two reasons for his extraordinary affection.

One is, that he was *mindful of his tears*, ver. 4. Probably *Timothy* had expressed his affection to the apostle in this way at their last parting, shewing that the love was mutual.

But he rises to a greater and nobler reason in the text. He loved him not only as a friend ; but much more as a Christian, for his faith and obedience to the gospel. This faith of *Timothy* he magnifies by two considerations.

1st, The character of it, that it was *unfeigned*. The apostle in this speaks his charitable apprehension, upon the credible evidence which *Timothy* had already given of the sincerity of his faith by his free profession and answerable practice ; which induced *Paul* to say again at the close of the verse, that *he was persuaded that this faith dwelt in him* ; that it had really a place and a powerful influence in his soul. He had as good reason for this persuasion, as one man can have in judging of another.

2^{dly}, The conveyance of it in his family. *Which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice, and I am persuaded that in thee also*. Religion hath been, as it were, hereditary in thy family. We find in *Act.* xvi. 1. that *Timothy's* mother

ther was a Jewess, and believed. She seems to have been a pious and devout woman in the *Jewish* religion, before she was directly acquainted with Christianity; but upon instruction in that, she proceeded from faith to faith. The grandmother on the mother's side, it appears from the text, was a person of the like character. Both of them had been early converts to Christianity: and it should seem in the order of their age; because this faith is said *first to dwell in the grandmother, then in the mother, and lastly in Timothy.* At least, if they were brought much about the same time to the christian faith, properly so called; yet in their several courses they had been acquainted with the revelations of the old testament, and were led by that means to wait for the consolation of *Israel*, and prepared to entertain the gospel when it was proposed to them. This faith dwelt in them successively one after another. *His father was a Greek, or a Gentile, as we are told in the same Act. xvi. 1.* Whether afterwards he became a proselyte, we know not. But from the apostle's omitting to make any mention of him here, it seems at least that he was not converted during his son's minority.

I would make a few remarks upon the text, preparatory to the principal instructions from it, which I intend for the main subject of this day's discourse.

1. I begin with observing, that the apostle doth not content himself with taking notice of *Timothy's* personal goodness, but observeth also his good descent.

If you ask the reason of this, and what purposes he may be supposed to serve by it?

It might be a *general* answer in this case; that, as a faithful servant of Christ, he rejoiced in the great extensiveness of his grace, and the number of his subjects. He was glad to take any occasion to mention

mention as many of them as he could ; which he seems to do with pleasure in many of his epistles. Upon a proper occasion he delighted to mention not only one, but many converts ; as a man who had no greater joy, than to see religion kept up in the world from one generation to another ; and that promise verified, that *instead of the fathers should be the children*, Psal. xlv. 16. It is the great concern of every man who heartily loves the interest of God and souls, that religion may be transmitted from age to age. Nothing gives more sensible grief to a good man, next to his own personal offences, than when the aspect of things gives an apprehension that religion may die in the hands of a present age. And for the same reason, it is a joy and pleasure to him, to see a succession springing up, where especially it may ordinarily be hoped for, in the families of them that fear God's name.

But I apprehend the apostle to have more *particular* views in the notice he takes here of *Timothy's* pious ancestors ; namely, these two.

1st, To represent the faith which dwelt in *them*, as greatly contributing to *Timothy's* own piety : as a great advantage which he had, beyond many others, towards introducing him into the Christian state ; and which by the blessing of God obtained that effect. It dwelt first in them, and so was derived to him. Grace and piety indeed do not necessarily and certainly run in a blood ; they are not transfused by generation, as a corrupt nature is. They who *believe in Christ's name, are born again, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God*, Joh. i. 12, 13. Yet it is one of the greatest advantages for religion that a man can have, to be religiously descended. We may also suppose the apostle to note this faith of *Timothy's* ancestors,

2^{dly}, To

2dly, To give an additional reason of his honour for him, and affection to him, since he followed their steps. He mentions the faith of those from whom he descended, as a real increase of his own honour, since he had not stained the line by degeneracy. Their praises by this means in a manner devolved upon him, and became his own. And at the same time the apostle gives it as one reason of his special endearment to *Timothy*. He loved him for the sake of his pious ancestors. *Paul* seems to have known and loved his good grandmother and mother; and therefore he was still the more dear to him upon their account. It may be they were dead and gone, when *Paul* wrote this; and he would shew his kindness to the dead by a redoubled affection for *Timothy* their dear remains. Many children share in a blessing both from God and men for the sake of the excellencies of those from whom they are descended; especially if they endeavour to resemble them in those excellencies.

These two things I design for our main subject at this time:

That a descent from pious ancestors is a singular advantage for disposing their descendents to piety and true religion also. And,

That when this proves the issue of such a descent, it is a just reason of particular honour and esteem for those descendents.

But before I enter upon the distinct consideration of these maxims, allow me to proceed in some farther remarks upon the text.

2. We may observe, that the apostle in *Timothy's* case could only take notice of this happiness attending him on one side, his mother's. The father, as hath been observed, was of another character. It is the greatest happiness indeed, when both parents, like *Zacharias* and *Elizabeth*, walk in all the ordinances and commandments of the Lord blameless, Luk. i. 6. Otherwise, while one parent draws one way,

way, and the other another way, there is great danger on the side of natural corruption that their offspring will be led the wrong way. And therefore, before settlements in the world, it should be much the care of religious parents for their children, and of religious children for themselves, that they *be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers*, 2 Cor. vi. 14.

But where through their own or their parents neglect, there is not that joint assistance in the religious care of a family which is to be desired; the pious party, whether husband or wife, should do the best in his or her power for the training up children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. There is much the more need of application and care by one party, if the other is not disposed to take a share. And this instance of *Timothy* should encourage hope of success. And children, who have been so circumstanced, should consider it, as a great blessing to have been religiously descended, though but from one of their parents. Even one believing parent entitles to the covenant, 1 Cor. vii. 14. And if that parent hath conscientiously endeavoured the everlasting welfare of children, they have a great advantage to answer for.

And the particular instance now under consideration, leads to observe the peculiar benefit of having *a good mother*. The first impressions upon children, and the forming of their minds and principles when most tender, depend principally and ordinarily upon the mothers. They have their children in minority more constantly with them: and nature commonly furnishes them with stronger affections, which give advantage for impressing tender minds. *Solomon* reviews with pleasure and honour the wise admonitions which his mother took care to give him sometimes, *Prov. xxxi. 1. The words of king Lemuel, the prophecy which his mother taught him, &c.*

3. I would note in the last place, that not only immediate parents, but remote ancestors may contribute very much to the spiritual advantage of those descended from them. It is not observed in vain, that *this faith first dwelt in his grandmother*. If we have had the advantage of a good parent, it may be we owe the goodness of that parent, next under God, to the pious care of a grandfather or grandmother. Now the first religious person of the line was the instrument that God made use of to bring religion into the family, and to transmit it down from generation to generation; so that all that come after have reason to rise up, and to call that first pious ancestor blessed. Or sometimes children fall under the immediate care of one remoter in the line, by the death or poverty of direct parents. By this means some children have had advantages for their souls by the care of a more distant parent, beyond what a negligent father or mother would have afforded them. Others have assistance from direct parents and remoter relations too in concurrence; which seems to have been *Timothy's* case, in whose instruction his more aged grandmother was able to bear her part along with the mother.

I now come to insist a little more largely upon the two heads of instruction, proposed for your present serious consideration.

I. *A descent from pious ancestors is a singular advantage for disposing their descendents to piety and true religion also.*

This I shall endeavour to represent in several particulars.

1. The children of good parents are in covenant with God. Even before they are capable of knowing and consenting to the covenant themselves, for their parents sake they are in a federal relation. God esteems them in a peculiar manner his care and charge. He declared this early to *Abraham*, Gen.

xvii. 7. *I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee.* And lest we should think this a privilege personal to *Abraham*, instead of its being a signification of God's gracious mind for the comfort of all pious parents in reference to their children; we may remember, that this declaration was the foundation of an institution applied in common to the whole nation of the *Jews*, that of circumcision; which plainly signified this blessing to be the common privilege of the church of God under that dispensation. And *St. Paul* is as express, that now upon the enlargement of the church in gospel-times the same privilege belongs to it; *Gal. iii. 13, 14. Christ hath redeemed us,—that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles by Jesus Christ.* And in *ver. 16.* he lets us know, that he means the promise made to *Abraham* and to his seed. The child of a good parent hath an interest in the covenant, beyond what other children have; and is in a fairer way to share in all the blessings of it. Others are to be brought into the sheepfold; they belong to the family, till they cast themselves out. *Salvation came to Zaccheus's house, forasmuch as he was a son of Abraham, Luk. xix. 9.* God is beforehand with such children, in assuring them of a gracious reception, if they arise and return to their father. Covenant-blessings stand entailed upon them, unless they decline, when they grow up, to stand to the covenant of their fathers.

2. They are more directly in the way of early instruction, which by the blessing of God may make them wise unto salvation. Good parents will make conscience of acquainting them with the mind of God betimes, to the best of their own and their childrens capacities. This is so certain, that God declares of *Abraham*; and it must be the same with all who are of the same pious spirit with faithful *Abraham*; *Gen. xviii. 19. I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, to keep*

keep the way of the Lord, and to do justice and judgment. Parents who neglect this necessary duty, whatever they may call themselves, are far from being the children of *Abraham*. This was *Timothy's* own case, as we learn from *St. Paul's* account of his education in this very epistle, ch. iii. 15. *From a child he knew the holy scriptures.* Pious parents will take care, that their offspring may have light betimes for discerning the several parts of their duty, to God, their neighbour, and themselves; their duty as reasonable creatures, and as sinners. They will assist with pious counsels, seasonable admonitions, and confirm all by a good example. And if this be done, certainly it may be hoped to have a good effect.

3. Conscience by this means will be possessed on the right side. By which I mean that power of the mind, that represents to a man sin and duty upon an apprehension of the mind of God in the matter, and accordingly approves or accuses him for his actions. It is of the greatest importance in life, that men should be possessed with a strong and lively sense of God's authority to give law to them; and then that they have right apprehensions, what is good and evil according to the divine law, or that their consciences be well informed. Parents in the course of nature have the advantage of making the first impressions. And good parents will not fail to make this one of their first cares for their children, to possess them with a deep sense of God and of the concern they have with him; and to the best of their own knowledge from time to time will endeavour to inlay right principles, as materials for conscience to work upon. And in the great lines of sin and duty all good people generally agree, however they may differ in other matters. Now these early tinctures of the mind are a great preservative against temptation, when

they first come to launch out into the world ; and they are not worn off at once ; and there is something to fasten upon, when God by ordinances or providences is taking farther methods for their saving benefit : while other children either have no principles instilled to oppose natural corruption, or occasional temptation ; or possibly such as rather strengthen and confirm their biases to evil. I doubt many owe that to the wicked influence and example of their parents, which others arrive at by a long course of sinning and of evil communication ; that *even their mind and conscience is defiled* ; as the apostle speaks, *Tit. i. 15.*

4. Religious exercises become familiar to the children of good people : and that is no small advantage. These are altogether strange and uncouth to persons, who have had the misery of growing up in families that call not upon God's name ; where, like a herd of beasts, they live without any joint acknowledgment of their maker from one end of the week to another ; and where neither precept nor example lead the rising branches to make private applications to God. If such as these have their lot afterwards cast into better families, where the exercises of worship are practised and pressed ; how burthensome doth the task appear ! how unpleasant and formidable is a practice so entirely new ! But in pious families young people are accustomed from their early days to prayer, and reading, and publick worship, and the observation of the Lord's day. And though the external performance of these things may fail of being attended with a saving effect ; yet it hath a tendency toward the best effect, toward inward and real religion.

5. They are ground better prepared than others for the ministry of the gospel. Others, for want of suitable instruction at home, come to attend upon
sermons

sermons without such a furniture of common knowledge as may enable them to apprehend even the most simple and plain terms in divinity; so that a preacher is in a sort a barbarian to them. But this impediment to success is in a great measure removed in the case of well educated children by domestic helps. Other children, for want of care rightly to inform and engage their consciences, have hardly any thing to take hold of, when they come under a gospel-ministry, when an appeal is made to their consciences. But where a foundation of good knowledge is laid, there is room for an appeal to it with good hope of success: like *Paul's* appeal to *Agrippa*, Act. xxvi. 27. *King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.* I have found the difference upon this account very great in conference with sick persons, as I doubt not many others have observed on the like occasion. When I have been sent for to some, though they had gone astray from the principles of their education; yet the benefit of it was still so far perceivable, that under present convictions immediate application might be made to their case by directions proper to that. On the other hand, poor ignorant creatures, when startled by the thought of death, could not be come at without instructing them in *the first principles of the oracles of God*; and before that could be done to any purpose, though with the greatest brevity, their strength and spirits have failed, so that one could proceed no farther.

6. They are inured to discipline, accustomed to be learning and receiving instruction. *A child left to himself, bringeth his mother to shame*, Prov. xxix. 15. That is the unhappy case of many children; they are left to their own heads, before they have understanding to conduct them, without instruction, check, or controul. But however pleased they may seem to be with this in the more thoughtless

less time of life, they themselves will find the bad effect of it sooner or later; and very probably their negligent parents will feel it to their grief of heart. On the other hand, in a well regulated family children will receive *line upon line, and precept upon precept*; be watched over, restrained where they need a bridle, and corrected for gross irregularities. Now this is a likely means to produce a teachable spirit; a frame of all others most useful and necessary in the way to salvation.

7. Their first conflicts with sin are under guides more experienced than themselves. Irreligious parents cannot be expected to take much care or pains to prepare and assist their children for opposing the snares and temptations of life; for they are not careful about it in their own case. But those, who are themselves engaged in the Christian warfare, who are *not ignorant of Satan's devices*, and are *fighting the good fight*; will shew their affection to their offspring, by being *jealous for them with a godly jealousy*, by endeavouring to keep them from *entring into temptation*, and by laying in the best preservatives they can from time to time against the snares to which they see them exposed. Their eyes will be quick at discerning any tendencies in their dear children towards being corrupted. And by that means such children have time to lay in a better furniture than others both for discovering and opposing the greater temptations of the world, before they actually launch out into them.

8. They are introduced into good company: and that is a very great advantage. They begin the world with a better sort of acquaintance than others. It is the misery of many, that they do not so much fall into bad company, as their parents provide them: It may be the parents themselves by their bad examples are the very worst acquaintance they have. At least ungodly parents are not likely to bring them into society which may be

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of service to their best interests; but they are let loose to become *companions of riotous men, to the shame of their father*, Prov. xxviii. 7. But the children of good parents grow up in familiarity with sober and virtuous acquaintance, such as may be hoped to confirm and cultivate, instead of weakening the good influence of the instructions they receive.

9. The bias of shame is fixed on the right side. Those, whose main converse hath been with irreligious people, and have seen little else beside bad examples, if they are brought to serious convictions, and to promising symptoms of a better mind, are ashamed to think of changing their former course, and of running counter to the practice of their intimates and acquaintance. This hath prevailed with many to return to their former vicious practices, after they had made a hopeful stand against them. On the contrary, those who have been bred up in the knowledge of religion, under the inspection of pious people, and in familiarity with men of shining graces, have all this to put them to the blush, if they admit any thought of a revolt. Especially when they can remember the excellences of their ancestors, recommended to their imitation by the consideration of authority, and by many endearments received from them; this must be a constant admonition not to come behind such near patterns, especially not to disgrace their memory by black miscarriages. It is an excellent saying of *Boetius*, * *If there be any good in nobility, it is this, that there seems to be a sort of necessity laid*

* Si quid est in nobilitate boni, id esse arbitror, ut imposita nobili necessitas quædam esse videatur, nè scilicet a majorum virtute degeneret. *Boet. de consol.* L. 3. prof. 6.

upon those of noble extraction not to degenerate from the virtue of their ancestors. I may say the like of a religious descent.

10. Divine grace usually begins with such more early than with others. As they are *the children of the covenant, Christ is first sent to them to bless them*; the reason which the apostle gives for the first overtures of the gospel being made to the *Jews, Act. iii. 25, 26.* And as they are furnished with such other peculiar advantages, as hath been shewn; the Spirit of God, who ordinarily works according to the means made use of, and by such means begins sooner with them than with the rest of the world, to awaken and impress their minds by the instructions given them, to convince them of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, and to excite them to yield themselves unto God. I believe there are none of the children of pious parents, if they would recollect what hath passed in their minds, and faithfully declare it, but must acknowledge that at some times they have found this true. So that it may justly be said of them all, that they *are not*, or at least once they were not, whatever alteration they may now have made in their case, *far from the kingdom of God.* It remains that I shew,

II. *That when the children of holy parents inherit the faith and piety of their good ancestors, the goodness of their parents, as well as their own, will conciliate to them a peculiar honour and esteem.*

1. Their own goodness in such circumstances will procure them peculiar honour and esteem. They will be loved and honoured by the great God; for *them that honour him he will honour, 1 Sam. ii. 30.* They will be the joy and pleasure of their parents and relations, if they survive to see this most desirable effect of their endeavours and prayers. They can have no greater joy, next to their own personal hopes

hopes for eternity, *than to see their children walk in truth*, 3 Joh. iv. They will be a peculiar rejoicing to ministers, as *Timothy* was here to *St. Paul*. Yea, *all that see them*, if they have any remains of goodness, *shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed*.

The reasons of this are obvious.

Because the hopes of good people in every age for the continuance of God's interest in the world, are principally from the seed of the righteous. They are ready to say, if the seed of *Israelites* will not hear, how shall *Pharaoh's* hear?

It puts an honour upon God's ordinance of religious education, and upon his promise of being the God of good men and of their seed.

It keeps up the names of their holy parents with credit, which are dear to God and good men. And,

It gives a prospect of more eminent usefulness in their day.

But I have only time to mention these things.

2. The *excellencies of their parents* will redound to their honour. As *childrens children are the crown of old men*, that is, on supposition that they answer expectation, and prove dutiful and virtuous; so *the glory of children are their fathers*, Prov. xvii. 6. The praises of their ancestors are by common consent allowed in a sort to descend to them, when they are like them. God grants them many marks of favour for their fathers sake: and good men, who loved their progenitors for what of God was in them, find their hearts insensibly knit to the pious offspring, as the inheritors of their name and of their resemblance too. Indeed when descendents become the reverse of the character of them who went before them; as their relation is too apt *unjustly* to be reflected as a blemish on their worthy predecessors, so it *justly* stigmatizeth a degenerate seed. If the parents did their duty, it is unjust to

impute the miscarriages of children to them, which they endeavoured to prevent : but it justly aggravates the guilt of such children, and fixes a mark of infamy upon them, if they run counter to all the advantages of a pious education. It is mentioned to the real and perpetual reproach of the sons of *Samuel*, 1 Sam. viii. 3. that *they walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment.* This was so perfectly contrary to *Samuel's* practice, that the very remembrance of him made the degenerate offspring to be the more abhorred by all *Israel*. But a virtuous, a prudent, a pious son or daughter, as they embalm the memory of a good parent, so they come into the world with the lustre of his or her reputation, and have a distinguishing share in the respect and good-will of good people upon their account.

I now come to some practical improvement of that which we have been upon. And the present subject gives occasion for an address to *three* sorts of people.

1. To parents that profess religion. If you are in that relation, this subject naturally leads me to be your monitor.

And you cannot wonder, if I begin with this exhortation ; that you should before all things be solicitous, *that unfeigned faith dwell first in your selves.* That you are your selves sincere Christians, and possessed of a lively and operative faith or persuasion concerning the great truths of the gospel. Your first care is to be for your own souls : what would it avail you to help your children to heaven, if you should miss the way your selves ? if you should see them on the right hand of Christ, while you find your selves on the left ? But alas ! who can expect you should take due care of their souls, if you are not set in earnest upon the salvation of your own ? If you love them as your own souls, it is all
that

that can be looked for. Parental duty will go dully and unnaturally on, if personal religion be not laid as the foundation. But though you should give your children good instruction; yet if your own hearts are not fixed for God and goodness, it is odds but that you will undo all that your instruction contributes to their benefit, by some fallies of unbridled nature, which will do more to corrupt them than all your grave counsels can do to promote their good.

But if you are under the vital power of religion your selves, use the most vigorous endeavours to transmit it to your descendents, according to your capacities and opportunities. *Travail as in birth for those who are your children by nature, till Christ is formed in them*; as St. Paul did for those whom he accounted as his children in spiritual bonds, *Gal. iv. 19*. In what I have said of the advantages of a religious descent, I have supposed you by proper care and culture to give them the several advantages that were mentioned, because I am sure you cannot behave as good parents without it: and I know not how you can be good Christians without conscientious endeavours to do the duty of the parental, as well as of other relations. Remember, God in the course of nature hath made them your peculiar care and charge: and certainly, if you attend to the interests of the soul as the principal in your own case, you will esteem this the main part of your trust for them. God often inculcates this duty upon you both in the old and new testament. If you have dedicated them to God in baptism, you then laid your selves under a solemn bond to do this. And how can you rationally hope or pray, that they should be comforts to you or blessings to the world, if you are remiss in parental advice and inspection? Would to God therefore every Christian parent would consider himself as one that aims at heaven, and who should

do his utmost to bring his offspring to the same state of blessedness.

2. I would turn my address from parents to the children of good parents. I would hope I have many such within hearing; whose consciences can bear them witness, that they have had the advantages of which I have been speaking; who either can remember an eminency of faith and piety in ancestors now gone out of this world, or yet in the patience of God are allowed to have such parents surviving. If this is your case,

Think, what reason you have to reverence their memories if they are already dead, and to love and honour them, if they yet survive. If they have faithfully endeavoured to secure their God for your God, to keep you out of the paths of the destroyer, and to preserve your entail in covenant-blessings; they have done more for you than if they could have bequeathed you the *Indies*: And if you have grace to make a good improvement of it, you will call them blessed to eternity; while the children, whose parents consulted their greatness more than their goodness, or by a foolish fondness and criminal indulgence left them to themselves, will account them at last their worst enemies. You have reason to follow good parents with a grateful remembrance, if they are gone beyond the reach of any other testimony of affection; and if they yet continue, to pay them all dutiful regards, to study how to requite them: for you are more indebted to them, than to any beside your maker. But then,

Take heed of trusting to the goodness of those from whom you are descended, as sufficient to your acceptance with God, unless the same goodness dwell in you also. *Think not to say within yourselves, we have an Abraham for our father, or an Eunice for our mother, unless you inherit what is good and godlike in them.* Though the faith and

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piety of your ancestors was sufficient to introduce you at first into the visible church, and might give you a share in the prayers and good wishes of many good people; yet they will not be enough to save you without your own faith and piety.

Reckon not your selves past the danger of a revolt from God, merely because you are the children of holy parents. The present age, and almost every day furnishes us with too many mournful instances of apostacy in the seed of the righteous. It is a melancholy thing to consider how many families of distinction yet survive in our nation, where the ancestors were eminently famous for all that was good, for personal and family religion, and for diffusive usefulness; but their descendents, now in being, retain not so much as the face of religion, but are either avowed infidels, or abandoned to debauchery and licentiousness. And in the occurrences of every day, we meet with degenerate examples, either in our own knowledge, or from the notices of our acquaintance, who either have brought the gray hairs of their pious parents with sorrow to the grave, or are likely to do so. This is and shall be for a lamentation. *Therefore let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.*

Be persuaded then to apply your selves faithfully and suitably to improve the great prize, put into your hands by your pious descent. Otherwise your relation to excellent parents will be a sort of stain upon their memories; and their relation to you will make you more detestable than other sinners. What plea can you use in the great day, when God, their acquaintance, and even themselves shall witness against you; that you had faithful instructions and warnings, a religious example, a tender care for your welfare from those who loved you as their own soul: How often would they have gathered you, as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wing! but ye would not.

not. They had many wakeful thoughts for your welfare, offered many fervent prayers on your behalf, intreated, reprov'd, corrected you, us'd line upon line, and precept upon precept: but you were deaf to the voice of the charmer, charm he ever so wisely or affectionately! how speechless must you be, if after all this you are impenitent and unbelieving! If you shall see *many at last come from the east and the west, and sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, with Lois and Eunice, in the kingdom of heaven*, but find your selves, though once *the children of the kingdom*, cast into outer darkness! What *weeping and gnashing of teeth* must this produce! *Mat. viii. 11, 12.*

But certainly it should not satisfy you merely not to degenerate; you should be ambitious to rise higher upon so advantageous a foundation. God and man expect it with the utmost reason. When you stand upon the shoulders of your forefathers, and have the benefit of their instructions, experience and example, you should be Christians of the first rate for knowledge, prudence, exactness of behaviour, and usefulness in life.

3. I would close all with a few words to them who have not had the happiness of a religious descent. Suppose *your father was an Amorite, and your mother an Hittite*; though you should not have much to say of their piety, their good example, or their care of you; yet since in the providence of God you are now within the means of salvation, I beseech you neglect not the advantages of another kind for your souls which God affords you, nor despair of success and acceptance in endeavours to make a good use of them. Possibly you have had other good relations in the want of religious parents; or your lot is now cast under good masters. Either of these may go far toward supplying the other defect. Or you have fallen providentially into

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a set of good acquaintance, or under a serious awakening ministry, by which means you have fair helps to become wise to salvation. Neglect not these advantages, pray to God to succeed them. If you were not so directly born in God's family, join your selves to it, then the great master of it will give you an hearty welcome. What *St. Paul* says to the Gentiles upon their admission into the church of God, and the rejection of the main body of the Jews for their unbelief, may be applicable to your case; *Rom. xi. 17. Some of the natural branches are broken off from the root; and thou being a wild olive-tree, art grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive-tree.* Those who were strangers and foreigners by natural descent, if they join themselves to the Lord in a sincere covenant, will certainly be admitted to be fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.



FINIS.

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